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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the complexities of apartheid with its implications for conducting systems-related research within the vortex of South Africa, a study investigated the implementation of a national system of preschool provision for South Africa. The investigation began by studying two earlier reports: the Reilly-Hofmeyr report of 1983 and the report of the Science Committee of the President's Council, both of which failed to question the segregated nature of preschool provision. The investigation also examined other literature on preschool education in South Africa. It was then determined that the ongoing study focus on the process that could serve as a networking function helping to forge a national coalition of support for the concerns of the young child. Two questionnaires were mailed to the "main actors" in the field, excluding the parents of preschool children, to explore opinions as well as provisions and services. In addition, visits were made to preschool centers. Among the 12 findings were (1) systems design is a hazardous and tentative activity, (2) a national aystem of preschool provision must be based upon the factors that influence the young child, (3) some form of state subsidy is necessary, and (4) the major shortcomings of preschool provision in South Africa are the lack of sufficient places for all those who need to be accommodated, lack of sufficient funding to maintain a viable preschool service, and lack of anything approaching sufficient numbers of competent staff to run the centers. (HOD)

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APRIL 16 - 20, 1986

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INVESTIGATING PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AND CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The fundamental realities of South Africa in the mid 1980s remain the twin evils of the political exclusion and economic deprivation of the great majority of the country's approximately 32 million people. In 1985 the population of the country, including the so-called "independent states", was as follows:

POPULATION OF SOUTH AFRICA (INCLUDING "HOMELANDS") 1985

ASIANS	WHITES	COLOUREDS	BLACKS	TOTAL
899 453	4 721 769	2 843 278	23 623 300	32 087 800
(2.8%)	(14.7%)	(8.9%)	(73.6%)	(100%)

(derived from Grobbelaar 1983)

Since the arrival of the first permanent European colonial inhabitants in the sub-continent in the middle of the 17th century, the history of the country has reflected the growing dominance, both politically and economically, of those of European descent. This so-called "white" population steadily enhanced its political and economic power by means of the increasingly formalized segregation of those deemed to be of other races, by their exclusion from the formal political processes within the state, and by economic policies and practices that have ensconced the "white" group in positions of economic advantage to the detriment of the rest of the population.

These policies, already firmly established by the middle of the 19th century, were consolidated at the time of the industrial revolution that occurred in the sub-continent with the discovery of diamonds and gold in the latter part of that century. The

decades following the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 were characterized by the further consolidation of white political dominance and by the refinement of an economic system based on job reservation, whereby only "whites" could be appointed to jobs beyond the un- and semi-skilled level, by an extensive and nefarious sytem of legalized migrant labour coupled with severe restrictions on trade unionism where it was not "white", by the vastly differential provision of a range of social services such as housing, health and education, and by land ownership policies that effectively restricted "black" land ownership to small and rural parts of the country.

Although 1948, the year in which the National Party came to power and began to implement its **apartheid** policy, has popularly been seen as a watershed in the history of South Africa, much of the policy of the new government was but the continuation and formalization of the policies of preceding governments, including the British colonial order. The new government, say Hartwig and Sharp, "pursued in most essentials the strategy elaborated by its predecessor. In particular, it continued to pay systematic attention to planned development of the (capitalist) economy." (Kallaway 311) The new government came to power thanks to massive support from the Afrikaans-speaking sector of the electorate, which was almost exclusively "white" at that time and of which the Afrikaners comprised some 60%.

The perpetuation of economic domination and privilege had a twin focus under **apartheid**. On the one hand, it involved consolidation of Afrikaner decision-making and economic power over against that of the English-speaking sector of the "white" population, which until 1948 dominated the South African economy to a remarkable degree. On the other hand, it involved the consolidation of "white" decision-making and economic power over against that of the rest of the population. Afrikaner Nationalist strategy and rhetoric therefore moved between exclusivism understood as protecting the Afrikaners, and exclusivism understood as protecting the "whites". It was a powerful vote-winning combination of strategies, secure in the knowledge that Afrikaner

electoral domination was unlikely ever to be at risk.

Both ends - promoting Afrikaner interests,and promoting "white" interests more generally - were served by the same means. While it would be impossible to elaborate fully on this topic here, some of the means that were employed were an Afrikaner-dominated "white" monopoly over parliamentary legislating and budgeting, a heavy commitment to the advancement of Afrikaner employment in the burgeoning "whites only" statal and parastatal bureaucracies, the promulgation of a battery of legislation that effectively eliminated the opportunities for competition for those not classified "white", tight control over the various educational sub-systems, and so on. A crucial dimension of the policies of domination was obviously the provision of differential social services for the different "population groups". It is within this context that educational services have to be understood in South Africa.

We have argued that the change of government in 1948 resulted largely in the continuation and formalization of the policies of preceding governments. There was, however, also a significant additional dimension that was to make a huge impact on the future politics of the country, however much **apartheid** can be said to have perpetuated basically the same economic order in South Africa as before. The National Party, having come to power as a result of the successful ethnic mobilization of the Afrikaner people, proceeded to give both a new ethnic focus to the policies of racism and segregation, and a particular ideological rationale to those policies. Not only were the labels "white", "Asian", "Coloured" and "black" ("native" in 1948) cemented by the Population Registration Act, but "blacks" were further subdivided into different "nations", not only as a basis for the "homeland" policy that followed later - a separate "state" for each of these "nations" - but also for purposes of ethnic and educational segregation in the "black" dormitory townships of the major cities. This strategy of "divide and rule" was based on a newly dominant rationale that attracted enormous support from the mass of Afrikaners.

The ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism rests on the fundamental assumption that individuals can only achieve full self-realization to the extent that they identify themselves fully with their group. The primary fact of life for all persons born in South Africa is, therefore, their ethnic label, for every facet of their lives will be dominated by that classification - where they may live, which schools they may attend, where they may run businesses, what jobs they may apply for, where they may receive medical treatment, what quality of social services they may enjoy, what pensions they may receive, and where they may be buried.

Afrikaner Nationalism has also drawn significantly on a brand of civil religion that has represented the Afrikaner people as having been placed in Southern Africa by the grace of God, and with a God-given task to act as the trustees of the other "peoples" of the country. An understanding of Afrikaner Nationalist action as constituting a divine "task and calling" served to mystify the policies of domination and privilege that were central to its appeal, especially when this was coupled with rhetoric concerning the need to maintain western civilized standards.

Via the ideology of "trusteeship", the Afrikaner Nationalists took upon themselves the right to determine the political framework for a South African future; via the ideology of separate "group freedoms", they attempted to transform political design into constitutional design, by arguing the need for each group to have its own geopolitical entity over which it held jurisdiction and within which the members of the group reached self-fulfilment. This unilateral assumption of the right to determine the rules of politics was coupled with a steady increase in the repressive apparatus of the state: police and, more recently, military force came to be widely used in the attempt to root out political opposition by means of an ever more repressive barrage of security legislation. Also, increasing restrictions on the free press and steady extension of

ideological control over the state-controlled media, notably television, served to deny the public any clear picture of public affairs.

The political dispensation of **apartheid** further divided the country's population by the creation of a myriad of administrative and governmental structures. This bureaucratic proliferation was necessitated by the requirement that each "population group" have its own administration for almost all facets of life, while the provincial system created at the time of Union in 1910 provided the rationale for a geographic regionalization even within the ethnic compartments. Thus there are in 1986 no fewer than 18 departments of education in South Africa, including the so-called "independent" black states which are recognized by no other country on the globe.

STATE PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

We have suggested above that a major weapon for consolidating "white" hegemony and privilege within **apartheid** society was the differential provision of the entire battery of social services including items such as health services, welfare and pensions, housing and education. The modern state is often still perceived as a "neutral" provider of social services, treating all persons equally unless circumstances related to inequity require them to be treated differentially. While this neutrality of the state is a moot point in all societies, in that the way criteria for differential social services are determined reflects what Bernstein has called "both the distribution of power and the principles of social control" (Young 1979: 111), in South Africa discriminatory provision of social services has in fact been a pervasive and conscious instrument of state policy.

In the history of the provision of educational facilities in South Africa, for instance, this was frankly extolled in the Christian National Education Policy Statement (1948), a document

which served as the blueprint for **apartheid** education. The Statement held that there were three principles for the schooling of those who were not classified "white" - "trusteeship, no equality and segregation" - and that "the financing of native education must be placed on such a basis that it does not occur to the cost of white education." (Rose & Tunmer 1975: 127, 128)

The purpose of such a policy was not simply to let the "non-whites" fend for themselves, or to receive such services as could be afforded once "white" services had been fully provided. Rather, it was designed to perpetuate "white" economic domination by refusing "blacks" the knowledge and skills that could allow them to challenge "white" economic hegemony. This was clearly stated by H.F. Verwoerd, future Prime Minister, in parliament in 1954, while explaining the Bantu Education system which was about to be introduced:

> There is no place for him [the "black"] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed."
> (Rose & Tunmer 1975: 266, quoting a speech in the Senate, 7 June 1954)

Schools serve as agencies for the perpetuation of economic inequality in that they play a crucial role in the maintenance of class divisions by the way they select members of advantaged social classes for the more privileged and powerful positions in society. Verwoerd's statement quoted above should not be understood simply as "racist", but as an explanation of how class barriers were to be perpetuated in a society where social class and racial classification coincided to a remarkable extent.

But schools, under the control of the power elites in society, also serve the crucial function of seeking to perpetuate and consolidate the dominant ideology. This too was recognized by the Christian National Education Policy Statement:

> ... we believe that the ... education of the native must

> be grounded in the life and world view ... especially ... of the Boer [Afrikaner] nation as the senior white trustee...
> (Rose & Tunmer: 243)

In other words, those not classified "white" in South Africa were to be educated within an inferior schooling sub-system, but were also to be "educated" to accept the ideology of their rulers, which included the notion that those not classified "white" were inferior beings. Judged by any standard indicator of educational equality - pupil/teacher ratios, per capita expenditure, quality and existence of physical plant, availability and quality of resources, student attrition rates, etc. - gross inequality exists in South Africa. A few statistics will illustrate this:

INDICATORS OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

POPULATION CLASSIFICATION	UNIT COST 1983/84 PRIM./SEC. SCHOOL	TEACHER-STUDENT RATIO 1984	TEACHER QUALIFICATION % WITH STD 10	STANDARD 10 PASS: UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE
ASIAN	R1 105	1:23	82.3	45.0
WHITES	R1 591	1:19	97.0	48.7
COLOUREDS	R 722	1:26	40.1	16.1
BLACKS	R 203	1:41	23.6	9.3

(Adapted from HSRC 1985: 31 ; Standard 10 = Grade 12; R1 = ca. 40c US)

These figures, dramatic as they are, do not, however, reflect the differential attrition rates in the schooling sub-systems for each of the "population groups", which is graphically illustrated by the following table:

PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS REACHING STANDARD 4 AND STANDARD 10

	1973		1984	
	STD.4	STD. 10	STD.4	STD. 10
ASIANS	83	25	100	58
WHITES	88	56	95	73
COLOUREDS	56	5	74	22
BLACKS	43	4	55	16

(Dostal & Vergnani 1984: 11, based on Sadie 1984; Std. 4 (= Grade 6) regarded as minimum for functional literacy).

If one combines the information contained in these two tables, they indicate that of the total "white" population, 35.11% can expect to proceed through schooling and obtain admission to tertiary institutions, whereas the relative figures for the other "population groups" are 26.1% for "Asians", 3.5% for "Coloureds" and 1.5% for "blacks". These figures further exclude the children, almost exclusively "Coloured" and "black", who never get to school at all.

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AND CARE AS A SOCIAL SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Throughout the world an impressive array of evidence has been building up that the earliest years of life are of crucial importance for individual development and for subsequent school success. This is well summarized in the **Statement on the Education of Three-to-Eight Year Olds** by the Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe in 1981:

> The period ... is **decisive** in the development of all children ... the most active phase of their awakening to the world about them ... a stage of rapid learning about social behaviour and relationships ... the period during which children acquire the basic skills of linguistic communication and numeracy.(Van der Eyken 1982: 150)

In spite of this recognition of the importance of the early years of life for human development, there are few instances in the world of universal or well nigh universal state-provided or state-subsidized provision of preschool educational and care facilities. Far from having a universal and compulsory system of preschool provision, the South African state has been relatively parsimonious in the provision of such facilities. As one would expect, in terms of the analysis of the political economy of South Africa given above, the lion's share of the resources coming from the state in this regard are devoted to the "white" sector, state-provided or subsidized facilities for the other "population groups" being minimal.

The need for preschool provision cannot, however, be viewed only in terms of the child. In societies where vast numbers of women, who are still generally considered as the parent with the basic responsibility for child-rearing, are forced by economic circumstance to seek work, there is obviously a substantial demand for preschool facilties of some or other - if not **any** - kind. Within South Africa, therefore, a surprisingly large and growing private initiative has arisen to provide preschool facilities: amongst all "population groups" except possibly the "white" this provision is significantly more extensive than the state sector. In spite of the efforts of private initiative in the field, current statistics regarding preschool enrolment reflect the marked disparities that exist:

PERCENTAGE OF COHORT IN PRESCHOOL FACILITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

	ASIAN	WHITE	COLOURED	BLACK
1980	3.0%	16.0%	4.0%	0.6%
1984	1.25%	19.0%	4.0%	0.6%

(HSRC 1985: 21, 29, adapted; Short 1981)

In much of the world, preschool provision is characterized by division of control between health, education and welfare authorities. This is also the case in South Africa. The state, not being committed to universal provision of such facilities, has confined itself largely to the specification of minimum standards to which private individuals and organizations need to comply should they wish to open and maintain such facilities.

One significant consequence of this panoply of regulations is that it has inhibited the number of facilities that might have been created by private and community action because of the unrealistically high standards required in terms of space norms and health regulations. The standards required are typically those in existence in "white" facilities. In the disadvantaged sectors of the population, where poverty is rife, no adequate financial supportive base exists to allow these standards to be met. Thus, by a policy of requiring "equal standards" for all such facilities, the state effectively perpetuates inequality and consolidates the deprivation of the majority of the people. The private preschool sector is characterized by a perpetual struggle for survival, in a situation where demand dramatically exceeds supply.

INVESTIGATING PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AND CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA: BACKGROUND TO THE PRESENT STUDY

Following the publication of the Report of a major investigation into the South African educational dispensation by the Human Sciences Research Council, a parastatal body, in 1981, the HSRC launched a follow-up study into preschool provision. Two reasons may be cited for this decision. First, one of the recommendations of the 1981 Report accepted by government was that the substantial failure rate in South African primary schools should be counteracted by "school readiness" classes, which were to be of a preschool nature. Beyond this recommendation, however, the 1981 study had not focused on the preschool field at all, and in the light of the "school readiness" recommendation, this was

deemed to be an important area for research.

This subsequent Report, commonly known as the Reilly-Hofmeyr Report in honour of the two researchers responsible, was released in 1983. The Report made certain recommendations about the future of preschool provision in South Africa, but added that "Details of implementation have not been included as such a study falls outside the terms of reference of this report." (HSRC 1983: 124) One consequence was the decision of the Southern African Association for Early Childhood Education, the oldest and probably largest preschool organization in the country, to commission research into the design of a national system of preschool provision for the country, given the Reilly-Hofmeyr Report's recommendation

> that the promotion of pre-school care and education services for children from birth to compulsory school-going age, as support systems to the home, be accepted as an urgent necessity and become a matter of general policy. This recommendation implies support for full-day pre-school programmes wherever such programmes are required by the community. (HSRC 1983: 124)

What the commissioning agency for the research hoped to have developed by the researchers was a system that was feasible organizationally and financially, and which would gain support from the state. The major reason why state support was deemed to be so crucial was that this was seen as the only way in which the financial viability of an extensive degree of preschool provision could be ensured.

The authors of this paper undertook to conduct the research, but only after they had prevailed upon the commissioning agency to make one significant change to the research brief. This was that we did not want to assume at the outset that a national system of preschool provision was necessarily an appropriate option. We undertook instead to conduct an investigation into the design of a national system of preschool provision, and to report our findings on such an investigation by the middle of 1986.

INVESTIGATING THE DESIGN OF A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF PRESCHOOL PROVISION FOR SOUTH AFRICA: RESEARCH DESIGN

1. Review of existing literature relevant to preschool provision in South Africa

As the research brief had emanated from the work of the Reilly-Hofmeyr investigation, and attempts by the SAAECE to reflect upon both that Report and the Report of the President's Council on non-formal education, it was decided to start the investigation by studying the two reports and what had been recorded of the SAAECE and other organizations' reponses to those reports. A literature survey would need to encompass also the recent literature on developments within the South African educational dispensation, within an adequate understanding of the contemporary political, economic and social context.

Only in very recent times, and then only occasionally and tentatively, have official and semi-official research reports in South Africa challenged the assumption that the basic "population group" compartmentalization of the social order was a non-negotiable "given", something within which all social research had to be conducted and all recommendations made.

In the preschool field, the Reilly-Hofmeyr report of 1983 was the first ever major official or semi-official report. This report fell neatly into the traditional paradigm, treating racially segregated provision as non-problematic, arguing rather that attempts should be made to eliminate the inequality that existed in the provision available for the different "population groups". By accepting the paradigm, it did not attempt to place the preschool field within an adequate politico-economic context, and so effectively treated the problem of underprovision as a matter of racial significance instead of reflecting also upon the class dimensions of the disparities that exist. In so doing, it effectively eliminated the likelihood of a whole range of

questions being asked about the interrelationship of the political order, the economic order, the family and the child.

The Report also tended to regard preschool educare as fundamentally an "educational" issue. It therefore failed to reflect on a concept of preschool educare more broadly, for instance by not considering the possibility that in an economy which requires an extensive female labour force, it might be essential for child care to be provided as a **social service**, irrespective of any "educational" dimensions of such provision.

The second Report, that of the Science Committee of the President's Council, was the result of an investigation into "Informal and Non-Formal Education in South Africa" and was published in 1984. This Council consists overwhelmingly of government nominees and supporters, advising the State President on matters of policy and conducting research into areas of concern designated by the State President. The "research" it conducts, therefore, not surprisingly often simply indicates the road that government has already decided to follow. It is widely seen as a body established to legitimate the policies of the government.

Within the ambit of its investigation into informal and non-formal education, the Report devoted some attention to the question of preschool provision. The Report gave strong support for recognition of preschool education on the basis that

> ... any **deficiency** resulting from **inadequate educational experiences during the first five years of life could have lasting effects despite remedial measures taken at any later stage.** (Republic of South Africa 1984: 108)

The Report, like that of the HSRC the previous year, also failed to question the segregated nature of preschool provision. Central to it, in fact, were highly problematic attempts to explain the existence of the politics of repression and exclusion in South Africa solely in terms of a cultural pathology of "black" people. The Report typified black people as belonging to a "traditional"

culture - irrespective of the huge number of "black" people that had become urbanized over more than half a century - and ascribed the fact that they did "not succeed in participating effectively in the mainstream of socio-economic activities in this country" to their

> failure to adapt to the requirements of the dominant cultural environment in which they find themselves, mainly because these requirements are alien to the cultural environment within which they grew up... (ibid.: 38)

The Report therefore seriously mystified the political economy of **apartheid** by explaining political exclusion and economic exploitation solely in terms of an undefined notion of "culture". Implicit was the notion that "culturally deprived" people need specialized treatment, which could then justify segregated institutions for whole groups of people.

Another feature of both the Reilly-Hofmeyr and President's Council Reports was that they paid very little attention to private initiative in the preschool field. This was remarkable in the case particularly of the President's Council investigation, which was supposed to be dealing with non-formal education. The HSRC Report, again, devoted a mere two pages to non-statal initiatives in preschool provision.

A great deal of other literature on preschool provision in South Africa was also available, much of it emerging from conferences or seminars under the aegis of the major private agencies operating in the field. Taken as a whole, however, it tended to reflect two cardinal features of South African society. First, it reflected the extremely segmented and isolated nature of social action within the society, with few organizations or individuals displaying any grasp of the totality of preschool provision in their contributions to such gatherings. Secondly, it indicated a tendency for the overwhelming majority of the main contributors to be "white" - the amount of literature on the preschool field written by persons of other classifications was minimal, and what

there was tended to focus very specifically on some or other project or local activity in the field.

We also devoted some attention to the international literature on preschool provision. Comparative education is an extremely complex exercise, and its literature is replete with warnings of decontextualized and indiscriminate "borrowing" from other systems. For this reason, and given the constraints of time we faced as researchers, we took an early decision to concentrate in our study of the international literature on the major arguments put forward in defence of the provision of preschool education and care.

2. Identification of the major actors

Our preliminary reading and consultations suggested strongly that no adequate information base was available about preschool provision in South Africa. This discovery was not really a surprise to us, as it is inherent in **apartheid** that social services, whether state or private, are racially segmented and that channels of communication between the various sub-systems are significantly atrophied. As the existing information had also come into existence largely via the agency of "white" actors in the field, we were deeply concerned that the information reaching us was likely to be seriously skewed, atomized and incomplete.

In this regard, we had to recognize that the commissioning agency, the SAAECE, while being a non-racial organization, was heavily dominated by "white" persons, many of whom had been in the field for several decades. As the base from which we were working was thus one of the organizations within a highly segmented structure, and as its leadership emanated overwhelmingly from one sector, and a minority sector, of the population, we sensed the need to make urgent attempts to broaden the base of our information.

This was a particular problem because in agreeing to investigate

the possibility of a national system of preschool provision, we took as a non-negotiable that our proposals would embody commitments to non-racialism and to democratic/community principles. This constituted an additional reason for us to "democratize" the information base from which we would draw our final recommendations. We also had to problematize our own location within South Africa, for though we considered ourselves first and foremost as South Africans, we had to face the fact that we were both classified "white" and so were unlikely to be able to escape easily from the sub-societal encapsulation that is the "natural" experience of all the people in the country.

We have already stated that hardly anywhere in the world is there universal provision of preschool services. In South Africa the first private response to this was to create facilities for "white" children. Given the economic exploitation of the rest of the population, the "white" group was the only one with the resources to provide such facilities. Gradually, however, facilities for "non-whites" were also established, but largely at "white" initiative. This was for two reasons. First, the social conscience of certain "white" groups, coupled with their access to resources and qualifications resulting from their privilged location in society, made such involvement possible. Secondly, where private preschool provision resulted from activity not involving "whites", the poverty of the group concerned made outside financial support - inevitably "white" - imperative. "Whites" therefore came to hold significant decision-making power even over community initiatives in the field. Thus the likelihood existed that in our contacts with privately provided preschool facilities, we would again encounter basically "white" paradigms.

A further decision we took was that we would not view our task as simply that of preparing a **product**, a research report at the end of the project which was likely to be read by only a small section of a small section of those involved in the preschool field. We were also determined that the **processes** through which we went to prepare for the writing of that report should serve a valuable **networking** function, bringing together those in the

field and encouraging them to work together - or at least to be aware of each other's programmes and principles, thus helping to forge a national coalition of support for the concerns of the young child. In this respect our work was a form of action-research, or action-by-research, and given the time and financial resources at our disposal, we regarded the **process** dimension of the project as arguably more important than the **product.** Our wish was to contribute to the politicization of the field, if by that is meant making preschool activity an arena for public decision making.

We decided on this strategy because of our own commitment to a non-racial and democratic South Africa, and also because we came to believe that the most "cost effective" way of promoting the provision of quality preschool education and care was via organic community and parental involvement, which in turn could promote community competence and confidence in a way that could be politically significant.

A further spur to this line of approach was our belief, based on the modern history of South Africa educational policy, that government would seek either to ignore any recommendations that might result from our report, or would remould them to fit into government's on-going policies of segregation and inequality of provision. To have one's work hijacked for the modernization of **apartheid** is distressing. Our view was further that current financial stringencies faced by both government and the private sector made it unlikely that either could offer significant additional resources for preschool education and care. The optimal utilization of scarce resources was, we believed, likely to prove a key factor in the future development of preschooling, and as we believed this should be linked to the democratization of the field, we decided to lay great stress on the networking strategy.

We therefore embarked on a programme of attempting to identify and contact the "main actors" in the preschool field. We decided to exclude the parents of preschool children as main actors,

because of the time constraints facing us, and concentrated on those working within preschool facilities, within agencies involved in activities we deemed relevant to the young child, and within sponsoring agencies. In addition to networking, we hoped also to extend our information base about a) services of all kinds available for the preschool child throughout the country, and b) the opinions of the main actors about how preschool services should be organized, and on what principles.

Our original tactic was to request all those we contacted to give us a list of the names and addresses of "main actors", and then to use these contacts for a gradual expansion of our resource population. A potentially major source of such information was the congregation of delegates at the biennial Council meeting of the SAAECE in Durban in 1985, a meeting that managed to bring together a far wider constituency than merely the SAAECE itself. The response again reflected the realities of South African society - few people listed anybody not in their own organization or society, and the names that did appear were largely devoid of names of persons not classified "white". Identifying and contacting the main actors turned out to be a laborious and tentative process, but an illuminating one nonetheless.

3. Use of questionnaires and interviews

While we were generating a core list of names of main actors, we also compiled two questionnaires, which we mailed or handed to people as our list developed.

The first was intended as an opinion survey, to establish the attitudes and opinions of the identified main actors with regard to the following: the need for preschool educare, how "effective" preschool educare could be understood and measured, its preferred location (e.g. within or outside the state system), how preschool educare should be held accountable, and the preferred strategies for achieving long-term goals for preschool educare in general.

The second was a survey of provision and services, by means of which we hoped to begin to build up a national register of programmes and service for young children. The questionnaire focused on each organization's area of concern, its aims and functions, a description of the programmes and services offered, the structure of the organization, staffing and employment practices, finance - including sources of income - and problems identified by each organization.

Our hope was that these questionnaires would bring information and opinions about preschool education and care going beyond the centre-based and education-focused type of preschool provision. We were aware that this mode of provision was dominant in the thinking of the commissioning agency, but were also concerned to develop our thinking about daycare and home-based approaches, as well as about preschool-focused adult and community activity.

Based as we were in Cape Town, we began to contact and visit identified main actors and institutions in the area, focusing our attention on the issues emerging from our questionnaires. We sought also to obtain some clearer sense of the range of approaches to preschool educare by observing the functioning of various preschool facilities.

The strategy followed, then, involved the gathering of names of main actors and key organizations, agencies and institutions, sending out questionnaires and conducting visits and interviews, and attempting as we proceeded to refine the questions we wished to ask, and to identify the groups of people to whom we seemed to be failing to gain sufficient access. This done, we could turn our attention to arranging visits to other parts of the country to widen the net we were casting. A predictable problem that emerged was that the return rate of questionnaires was far higher from "white" respondents than from members of other "population groups", which forced us to try to skew our personal contact and visits towards other sectors of the population.

4. Nationwide visits and consultations

Within the limits of our research budget we began to visit other centres, both rural and urban, to pursue the search for information and opinion we had begun from our base in Cape Town. Each of these visits sought to bring together the various elements of our research strategy: adding to the list of "main actors", handing out and collecting questionnaires, visiting preschool facilities and bringing together interested parties in each region. We attempted also to emphasize contact with persons not classified "white".

As we have already noted, the networking function was crucial to our intentions. In several centres the meetings we held constituted the first coming together of people working in the same field, often within a few miles of each other, but who had no idea of each other's existence or work because they were of different classifications and so effectively lived in different worlds. The success of **apartheid** in segmenting society is nowhere more clear than when one attempts to bring together representative groups of people from the same geographical location. We also found it necessary, on these occasions, to introduce carefully structured procedures to prevent sessions being dominated by the "white" participants to the exclusion of all others. The plenary parts of such gatherings we used to make clear what our basic commitments were, both because we wished them to be public and because we hoped that such action would make people more willing to speak to two "white" strangers. We also used these meetings as occasions for sharing information we had gathered in other parts of the country, and for establishing contacts between people across the country.

A fundamental constraint was provided by the tumultuous events within South Africa in 1985. As a result of the new constitution that took effect at the beginning of the year, increasing extraparliamentary activity and high-handed attempts by the security apparatus to suppress that activity resulted in an outburst of violence unparalleled in the country's history. A

partial state of emergency was declared, hundreds of people died and thousands were detained.

These circumstances closed off certain areas and institutions to the research team, many people being unable or unwilling to speak to strangers in such a volatile political climate. Preschool activity was severely disrupted, parents kept their children home, and certain preschools were even burgled to steal food, such was the level of dislocation within the country. It was difficult to encourage people to think of systems of preschool educare in times such as these - in fact, many believed that simply to do so was to support the regime, for the revolution was at hand, and such matters could wait a while.

TENTATIVE FINDINGS

We have attempted in this paper to focus on the complexities of doing systems-related research within the vortex that is South Africa. We conclude with an indication of the major trends in our thinking at this stage of our work, with the caveat that the points included in this section are presented in a more or less random way.

1. Systems design, while restricted by certain parameters such as finance and the availability of human resources, is not a "technical" matter. It is essentially a matter requiring decisions of a personal, political and ethical kind: that is, it concerns decisions regarding **values**, which are not obviously and easily amenable to empirical investigation or validation. Similarly, issues of systems design are not technical in that they can ignore decisions about the **nature** of the service to be provided, as this has a significant impact on a whole range of issues such as physical plant, qualifications and forms of training for staff, health requirments, available outdoor space, and so on.

For instance, the main actors seem to have a heavily "educational" focus to their thinking about preschool provision, which is an aspect obviously not to be ignored but one that seems to be inadequate given the economic system operating in the country and the imperatives for child care services that this occasions. This is another aspect of the "values" issue that makes systems design excruciatingly difficult.

Assuming that the way to proceed in such circumstances is by making public the assumptions upon which one's recommendations rest, there is also often no obvious and necessary link between the principle one sees as undergirding the system one proposes, and the design of that system itself - there may be many permutations which facilitate the attainment of the same principles of provision, or, again, there may be arguments about whether different alternatives would serve the same ends, or

would do so equally effectively. Systems design is a hazardous and tentative activity. We should be under no illusions in this regard.

It seems, in the light of these considerations, that it is vitally important to attempt to lay open the sorts of assumptions that are embedded within any design, to open debate about the cardinal values that people hold dear and which they would hope to see embodied in or facilitated by a system, and to counteract the view that design is merely a "technical" matter, which should be left to "technical experts" in Pretoria.

2. Preschool provision cannot of itself be expected to put right the inequalities of a society, any less than educational equality can be attained by schools alone. Any proposal for the design of a national system of preschool provision must, therefore, be based upon a comprehensive understanding of the factors which influence the young child, and must be located within broader proposals, to include such aspects as health and welfare services, child-minding opportunities for working parents, housing and employment policy and legislation, resources to deal with poverty and malnutrition, community development strategies both urban and rural, and the like. Much of this is ultimately dependent on the existence of political will, but there is no indication that the present government has any intention of abandoning its traditional policy of discriminatory social services.

3. The major characteristics of South African society at present are the political exclusion and economic exploitation of the great majority of the population. The major impact of these characteristics on social services is that they are racially segregated and that they are provided inverse to need. The major response from the majority of the population to these policies is that government, and government services, suffer from a lack of credibility. Government is still following the course of placing any proposals in regard to any social services within a racial framework. Any proposals for a national system of preschool

provision need to bear these points in mind, for government has a history of distorting proposals for social reform to fit its ideological position.

4. In addition to racial compartmentalization, preschool provision in South Africa suffers from the world-wide malaise of divided control between educational, health and welfare authorities. Any proposal for a national system will have to bear this in mind, in order to seek to reduce the negative consequences of such compartmentalization.

5. Current "constitutional reform" in South Africa has become such a convoluted and incomprehensible activity, as the state tries to devise means of "power sharing" that leave Afrikaner Nationalist control unimpaired, that one cannot at the moment design a structure for **any** public service with any clarity about what the overall structures are within which it will have to operate. This makes specific proposals impossible, even on so clearcut a matter as the relative roles of national, regional and local structures and their articulation.

6. The major shortcomings of preschool provision in South Africa at present are the lack of sufficient places for all those who wish to be accomodated, lack of sufficient funding to maintain a viable preschool service, and lack of anything approaching sufficient numbers of competent and confident staff to run those services. Proposals designed to attend to these shortcomings will need to be of such a nature that priority is given to the greatest shortcomings in the areas of greatest deprivation.

7. A major constraint on the design of a system that can meet immediate needs as economically and effectively as possible, is the dominance of "First World" standards for provision in matters such as space norms, health requirements, building standards and staff qualification requirements. More flexible regulations will be necessary, but will have to be viewed in principle as temporary, given the suspicion among the politically excluded that such standards are designed to provide deliberately inferior

services. This is especially the case as population patterns resulting from residential segregation make it likely that most preschool facilities will remain **de facto** segregated institutions for at least the immediate future.

In this regard, the retention of the existing norms within the privileged sector - norms to which all then tend to aspire - will also have to be questioned as inappropriate for a developing country. Cost effectiveness, or quality of provision, does not require the current high-status and high-cost provision that exists in the privileged sector. A major problem here is that the "white" preschool establishment tends to see such norms as having been fought for over many decades and therefore as valued gains that should not now be jettisoned.

8. The most effective way to provide for rapid growth in the provision of preschool services, coupled with democratized control, would seem to be the establishment and support of a number of regional community development centres, under the control of the local community and providing a wide range of services such as adult literacy and adult education facilities, community health care and social work resources, agricultural and industrial extension services, legal aid resources, places for community congregation, preschool facilities and resources, preschool training facilities, homecare advisers, after-school care facilities, youth clubs, and the like.

Another way of understanding this is to state that the problems of providing adequate preschool services should be seen within the context of community development, but where that means providing the opportunities and resources for the community to develop itself rather than that the community should be "developed" by outsiders on the basis of the latter's conditions and assumptions.

9. In addition, some form of state subsidy for preschool facilities that is realistic within the norms of current state budgeting seems to be imperative. Three forms of subsidy are

possible: per-institution, per-child and per-staffmember. In order to meet our criterion of prioritization in relation to need, a per-child subsidy based on some form of means test seems the most appropriate, though capital expenditure also constitutes a difficult problem.

10. Regarding private sector support, a greater sense of responsibility by business and industry towards their workers and their workers' children is needed, but trade unions have thus far not devoted major attention to the rights and legal position of particularly the working woman. It is possible that the companies signing the Sullivan Code could play a pioneering role in this regard.

11.It also seems to be a matter of urgent concern that a national Child Information Centre be established, to serve as both a "clearing house" for information and as a focal point for research and action on behalf of the young child in South Africa.

12. Finally, a major concern for any person concerned to attempt to bring about change in the volatile context of South Africa needs to be exposed to the complexities of the nature of change and how it occurs. It is only within attempts to understand the dynamics of innovation that people can dream their dreams and perform their work with any hope that dreams and work might one day be translated into reality.

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